

ICEHOUSE BURNING THE END OF THE ICE CUTTING ON SILVER LAKE



A SAGA BY GERRY O'REILLY

ICEHOUSE BURNING THE END OF THE ICE CUTTING ON SILVER LAKE



The Park on the shore looks bleak on a cold winter day. The site of the Ten Hills Ice House, long gone. There is a place to sit and enjoy – so do it.

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THE LAST ICEHOUSE ON SILVER LAKE

To go sunning on any hot summer day in the early 40's was the best casual time ever spent – lazily. We would walk down to the Lake (Jim, Mackey, Ray Morris, Frank Kehoe, Paul Horgan, Bill Fabiano, Dave Sullivan, and others) and climb up to the roof of the icehouse. Bob Goss' backyard was the old miniature golf playground and the icehouse. He did not have very far to go to enjoy the hot roof. We would walk up the ice ramp and then a ladder to the roof and spend a summer day getting a tan or severe sunburn. Look out over the Lake, all beaches full. Beaches were Sullivan's on Lake St. then the Salvation Army (Riddles), Melzar's (private), Skylark with the boathouse, two canoes and a wooden raft, then over to Bloodsucker (they were all squirming in the muck) over to Danger in the corner (no Town Beach, but a high bank overlooking the Lake with the Dance Hall cement slab still in use*). The old icehouse stonewall still in place 2-feet in the water, around the corner to Moxie (sign painted on Fuller's house of the guy holding the bottle). The real sign was on the hotel boathouse that burned down in 1932 and finally down to Baby at Tom McQuaids. When we were on the roof the only thought was to take a long dive out and into the Lake, but no one ever had the guts. When it got too hot we would slip inside the house and sit on the blocks of ice that were covered with three feet of hay, really, really cool. That was the last year for ice, empty the next year. Summer camps only had iceboxes and 5, 10, 15, and 20 cardboard signs in the window for weight needed.. Ten Hills of Somerville ran the operation. To end the day of pleasure we would climb down then over to "Tat's" for a vanilla cone.



Steven's Market, Silver Lake Betterment Association, and the Icehouse



The 1935 Icehouse from Lake Street, Main Street in the background.



Same era, Grove Avenue in the background.

THE ICEHOUSE SAGA, PART TWO – CUTTING AND FILLING

The last time Silver Lake was cut (43 or 44, not sure someone may know) when the Lake was clear as glass with no snow covering and was well twelve-inches thick. All men in place with picts and iron-pointed chisels ready for the most intensive workday ever invented, early dawn till late at night (a flood light on the ice house lit the night). The cutting began with a self propelled three-foot circular saw driven by a model A engine that cut six-inch kerfs in the ice blowing frozen saw dust into the wind. The first cut was away from the ice house far out to the middle of the Lake in three-foot lines followed by intersecting cuts six feet apart. Work began before the ice was all cut. It was chipped into single 3 x 6-foot blocks and then pushed into the hauler that carried the ice up the side of the building to load into the three-stall house. At each level the ice blocks slid down an inclined plane ramp at the rear of the building that was raised when the first layer of ice was in. Men everywhere with picts and ice tongs, no let-up or rest; it was just push ice and push more ice. The blocks were filled vertically to prevent cracking. To haul the ice up from the Lake think of two bicycle chains and sprockets connected six-feet apart by rails (to hold the blocks) running from the water to the wheel house high at the rear of the building, counter clockwise. Work never stopped until the three stalls were filled and the whole operation ended and the icehouse buttoned up. The ice cutter fell into the Lake that year and was never fished out. I was on the Main Street side of the open ice and Bob Goss was on the Grove Avenue side when the cutter dropped down into the Lake quietly, gone. Think of it, kids all over the Lake just watching the work and surrounding the open water occasionally riding one of the ice floes in; OK who was in charge. (Rick Fudge when scuba diving many years later saw what he thought was an old car on the Lake bottom; it was probably the old ice cutter.) If you ever see John White ask him about the intense day of filling the Old Icehouse, he was there. Two weeks later the open ice was frozen solid and the big guys lit bonfires on the lake shore and wonderful nights of skating followed. When the wild winter snow storms followed and the wind blew fierce across the Lake the snow piled high on Main Street in drifts. Summer-city kids never shoveled the Lake clean or stood beside a blazing fire on a moonlit night.

ICEHOUSE SAGA ADDED

The Ten Hills Ice Company of Somerville was the last to manage and cut the ice for mostly city use so the result was that the icehouse emptied out fast that last year. Floyd Lyons delivered for Wilmington Coal and Oil and "Buddy" delivered in South Tewksbury for his father J.G. MacClellen (Johnnie Mac), Lefty Gratzky and Jake Riley also delivered ice. The neighborhood screamed when the iceman cometh and all kids wanted a sliver or a chip. When the icehouse was finally emptied the big guys at the Lake pulled off some 12-inch boards at the lakeside of the building tied them together and built the greatest diving board that ever hung out over the saw-dust bottomed Lake. The Viet-Nam generation knows the spot as the "DROP."

THE ICEHOUSE SIDE SAGA

Bob Burris (d. 1996) in a story in "Silver Lake, Collected Memories" told well of the time when he was 15. His father got him a job at the icehouse when the ice was cut and the blocks were ready to fill the house. He said that it was his job to push the ice blocks onto the drive chain that carried the ice up to the ramp and into the icehouse. He was on one side and his father was on the other. They pushed the blocks up with long poles that had iron spikes on the end - it was hard work, non-stop. When the sun went down Bob was ready to go home and sack out. What a surprise he got; a large floodlight that was high up on the icehouse wall was turned on and then they worked till midnight non-stop. They then quit and went home to get ready to get up at six the next morning and back to the icehouse. The labor kept up for the next few days until the house was full. Bob never forgot the icehouse and always said that it was the hardest that he had ever worked.

ICEHOUSE BURNING

I was home in the yard when 142 blew, I looked skyward, no smoke, then the second alarm sounded - I thought, wow! there is a fire down at the Lake and probably a cottage - the dry-wooded buildings sitting on cedar post went fast and I'd better hustle if I was to see it go.(Camps went up in a quick blaze and once the tarpaper caught they were all gone.) I ran through the path in the woods coming out near Sullivan's on Lake St. The camps in the woods were intact. I looked over the Lake and the icehouse was smoldering but no blaze. Then big black clouds of smoke poured out of every crack in the building, but still no flames. I ran along the inside of the fence at Main Street and over to the Weigh Building and sat on the scale (only a few of us remember the Weigh Building). There was no wind but the black smoke was billowing straight up. Then the roof started to flit a few flames; the inside of the building was roaring and you could hear the air being sucked into the building where the bigger kids had pulled the siding off for the diving board. Then the roof burst into a gust of flaming red and orange bursts, no smoke. The fire roared skyward- no wind saved the buildings on Grove Avenue. The walls began to show flames and black fierce smoke flashed high and then the roof imploded and collapsed and then the walls collapsed on the roof; furious burning. The fireman now responded, first with the red two-inch hose and then with the larger lines hooked to the hydrants...then only smoldering. The inside two dividing walls burned completely down. The icehouse was gone, never to be filled again. The burned char remained in place for a year and a half. In the winter that followed the snow would drift over Main Street and would completely cover the sidewalk because of the wind blowing over the remains of the icehouse. The snow fence in place today prevents drifts, but only when there is snow and a howling wind.

Ten Hills allegedly let it go for taxes. Many years later speculators moved in and sought to build a two-story, 12 apartment money-maker on the site. The neighbors said no and the site became a park "forever". Should be dedicated to the Silver Lake Chapter of the Aids to Victory.



Icehouse Gone



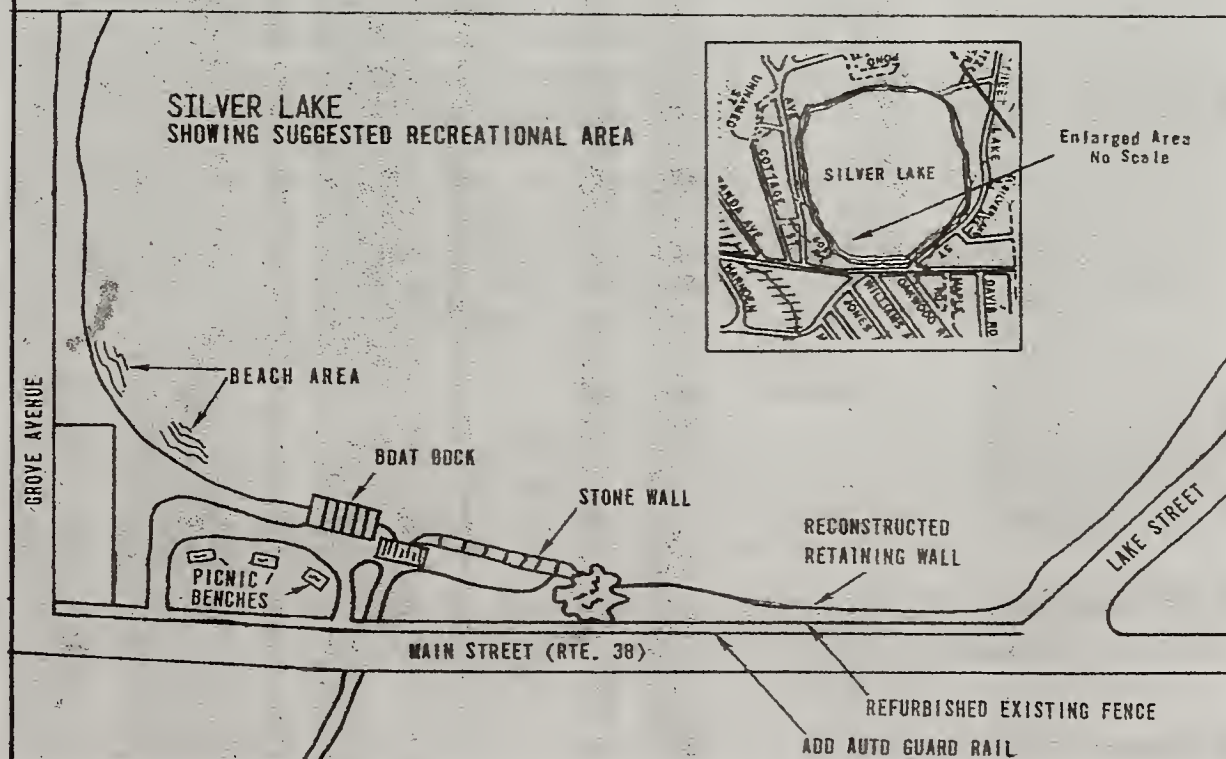
Same spot as above and is now the Park at Silver Lake

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT OF SILVER LAKE

In 1985 some local neighbors at the Lake were worried that the Old Ice House property was going to be developed for a 12-unit, two-story building. They felt that that it would end their clear sight of the Lake and its beauty. I got the call to help; I went to the board of Selectmen and they said there was nothing they could do. With local Lake neighbors help we petitioned the Town and the result was that the people voted to purchase the property and then voted to make it a park forever. See the Articles.

SUGGESTION AND PLAN TO UPGRADE THE FORMER ICEHOUSE SITE AT SILVER LAKE ALONG ROUTE 38 SO THAT IT WOULD BE SUITABLE TO ENJOY AND USE AS A TOWN RECREATIONAL SITE WHILE PRESERVING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE LAKE.

1. Add a new auto guardrail on the street side of the sidewalk.
2. Rebuild the present concrete post and wood rail fence. This fence has been in place for more than 50 years and has withstood time, name carves, and the weather quite well.
3. Seek State aid and expertise to rebuild the retaining wall (dam) along Route 38.
4. Build a washwall for fishermen to sit upon.
5. Put a footbridge over the spilloff stream.
6. Put in a boatdock for small boats and canoes (hand carries).
7. Beaches already exist, but the bottom of the lake needs cleaning.
8. Picnic benches could be made of concrete and be immovable.
9. Landscape the entire area with the knowledge that it will be constantly used.



Article 8: (drawn as #5), MOTION , "I move that the Town vote to take by eminent domain or purchase the following described parcel of land for conservation purposes:

Easterly by Main Street	410 feet
Southerly by land of Julian,	158.12 feet,
Burpee, Hurley, and Williams	39.88 feet, and
in three courses	66 feet
Northwesterly by Silver Lake	480 feet

containing 58,420 square feet being Lot B, LC Case 11903A and an unnumbered lot shown on plan entitled "Angle Street Plan of the Silver Lake Property, situated in Wilmington & Tewksbury, belonging to Daniel Ayer, Geo. W. Butterfield - C.E., Lowell, Mass., Aug. 17, 1854, Scale 200 feet to an inch", and also shown as Parcels 117 and 118 on Assessors' Map 45; and to authorize the Town Treasurer with the approval of the Selectmen to borrow the sum of \$100,000 under and pursuant to Chapter 44, Section 7, clauses 2 & 3 of M.G.L. and to issue bonds or notes of the Town therefor; and to authorize the Selectmen to apply for grants-in-aid from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the federal government; and to do all other acts necessary or incidental thereto." Motion was seconded. Finance Committee recommends disapproval, just prior to the meeting the Finance Committee changed their recommendation to approval. Just an explanation of the reasons for taking this land to protect our lake was given. With 2/3rds required a standing vote was taken
YES 596 NO 25 Motion so voted

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING - APRIL 27, 1985
WITH ACTION TAKEN THEREON

letters to the editor

Dear Larz:

Did you ever catch a polywog?

Did you ever hear a bullfrog
moan?

Did you ever see a six inch,
copper colored bloodsucker
cycle through the water?

You can. They are all in Silver
Lake, but maybe not for long!

Silver Lake is our town's only
natural resource and this
resource is in danger of being
blighted when the proposed
office is constructed on the
Route 38 site along the lakeside.

I don't think that this par-
ticular site should be developed;
it should be made available as a
recreational site for our town —
a place to swim, to fish, to boat,
to polywog, and on quiet sum-
mer nights to listen to the croak
of a large mouth bullfrog.

If we save Silver Lake now
and use it as a recreational site
it will be available in the future
also.

Sincerely,
Gerry O'Reilly

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ARTICLE 31: (Drawn as #34) To see if the Town will vote to instruct the Board of Selectmen to beautify and maintain that piece of land known recently and formerly as the Hale Icehouse property for the purpose of Recreational use and to conserve that land for now and forever.

Motion by Jere O'Reilly, motion read the same as the main article. Motion seconded and so voted
Finance Committee feels this is already the responsibility of the town

Pictured below is the steel rail fence that replaced the post and rail that people sat on, fished from, and enjoyed the view. This rail is hard.



SITTING ON THE WALL

Kindred youths upon the wall,
Early Spring till late in the Fall.
No wars or bombs do they fear,
Rambling now is their career.
But soon their lives to unfold,
And bear the cares centuries old.
Of grief, hardship, and of tears,
Unknown now in early years.
We see them and are glad,
We had our wall as lass and lad.



The stone wall at Lubbers Brook protected by a steel fence; no one can sit on this wall.

AFTERBURNER

Old picts of just hanging around Silver Lake, carefree days of Summer so many times of long ago.



Use the next framed page to post an old photo and pen some words of memory.



The Icehouse covers what is now the Town Beach; it burned down in 1932.



"MOXIE"

WINTER



A shoveled spot waiting for the game to start, ten on a side.



The Bridge at Silver Lake

THE DANCE HALL FLOOR AT THE TOWN BEACH

The greatest crime at Silver Lake was the day the hammers croaked the slab into rubble and carted it away.

The Silver Crest open-air dance hall was on the shores of Silver Lake where the Town Beach is today, but before my time. I only remember the Bandstand and the remains of a beat-up piano. When the beach opened, the slab was the perfect place for all to play handball, mothers to sit in a lawn chair and rock the kid in the stroller, and for all the teens to sunbathe, huddle, and giggle. Does anyone remember "The Slab"? If you do not, then you will never miss it.

If you have a favorite memory of Silver Lake jot it down on the next page. Do you have a gang photo at the Lake; paste it down.



On a Summer day on the smooth un-rippled water with bullfrogs hiding, darning needles darning and a paddle in hand.

Gerry O'Reilly

**The memories stated are mine.
Others may differ – that is what
Makes it so interesting.
scratch**

